

## Celebrating World Maritime Day September 25

***As maritime organisations around the world celebrate all things sea-going, Ports North takes a look at how and why the Far North has one of the most beautiful and effective harbours on the east coast of Australia.***

**F**ROM the moment a ship contacts a shipping agent, to the minute it arrives at one of the wharves in our port, many cogs are spinning to make sure nothing can, or will, go wrong.

Such is the complex behind-the-scenes clockwork that keeps the Port of Cairns port safe, welcoming and efficient. From the Harbour Master who conducts the orchestra on the water - Vessel Traffic Services (VTS) and the marine pilots; to Ports North, which ensures comfortable berthage; maritime procedures have dramatically evolved into the smooth sailing we have today.

### ***The harbour master***

“There is nothing better than seeing a magnificent ship coming into our inlet,” Harbour Master Captain Michael Barnett says. “All eyes are on it, and its crew and passengers on us. It’s a great feeling.”

Captain Barnett has been the Regional Harbour Master based in Cairns now for two years. He follows in a long line of Harbour Masters, the first appointed in Trinity Bay in October 1876.

His role within Maritime Safety Queensland (MSQ) encompasses harbour regulation, port navigation (including the maintenance of buoys, lights and channels), pilotage (including pilots, boat crews and boats), commercial licensing examinations and safety programs, investigating and managing marine incidents and pollution response – the latter done in cooperation with the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection and Ports North.

The Cairns Harbour Master also oversees the region’s ports from Mourilyan, north to Cape York and beyond to the Northern Territory border.

And it is Captain Barnett that everyone turns to when seeking shelter from a storm. The Harbour Master takes the lead during a cyclone or major weather events. He will assess and activate a series of warnings, rising from yellow to blue and then to red before closing the port. He will also advise Ports North and government agencies on relocation of vessels in the harbour to more sheltered moorings and the movement of larger commercial vessels to sea.

But a captain is nothing without a dedicated crew. When a ship wants to come into Cairns, he too, relies on the efficiency of those dedicated to each element of the journey.

So how does it work?

### *The shipping agent*

To enter Cairns a ship must first notify a shipping agent of its intent.

The visiting ship's captain tells the agent where the ship is coming from, how big it is, when it is due, what services it requires - as a cargo ship (unloading and loading), a cruise ship or a leisure boat.

This information is entered into the Q Ships booking system – a state-wide monitoring and data base for all maritime traffic along the Queensland coast, and Ports North is notified so a berth can be allocated.

But there's more to being an agent than entering data.

Chris Dunn is the Port Manager for Inchcape Shipping, one of the larger agencies based in Cairns.

"We take on about 80 per cent for the region," he says. "That's a few hundred cargo ships each year and about 80 to 90 per cent of the cruise ships.

"We make sure the loads get in and out on time, and we work with the crews. A lot of them don't speak English, because they're on international ships. We make sure they get anything they need. We hire provedores, provide medical assistance, we also help when there's a death on board."

After nine years in the business, Mr Dunn says he has come across a few "interesting" requests.

"I had to get a satellite dish on the mast of a very big container ship," he recalls. "The crew were desperate to watch the World Cup Soccer!"

### *Vessel traffic services*

Back at MSQ headquarters at the southern end of Trinity Inlet, VTS staff pick up the information supplied by the shipping agent from Q-Ships and notify Ports North, the departments of Customs, Environment and Heritage Protection, Immigration, and Agriculture Fisheries/Forestry (DAFF), coordinate a time of entry, depending on the ship's draught (depth) and tides, and if it needs a marine pilot (for vessels over 50m) and/or tug boats.

Step into the VTS office and the myriad screens and security cameras flash above desks equipped with radio mics, mapping data and computers in a scene reminiscent to an air traffic control tower.

It's a far cry from the way shipping was conducted around 100 years ago.

These days, shipping is highly regulated especially through the Great Barrier Reef. Since 1996, groundings of ships have reduced from one a year to only three in the past 18 years.

The VTS is the ports' eyes and ears – watching every movement from the outer reef shipping channels to the smallest inlets. Every boat is visible on screen.

Two operators keep vigil, talking to captains, monitoring ship progression, alerting ships to any delays or changes in other ships' plans, and watching the CCTV cameras as ships leave or enter at the various ports MSQ oversees.

"The key objective is safety," says one officer. "We can watch the whole journey of a large cargo ship, right to shore. We are linked in to agencies throughout the world and we can get a message out instantly if we see difficulties."

### *The marine pilot*

As a ship nears Cairns, the first person to board is the marine pilot, about 10 nautical miles out from the harbour. The pilot meets with the Ship Master, who is briefed on the procedure.

"We go out on behalf of Ports North to ensure the safety of the Port – its infrastructure and the environment. In other words, we make sure the ship doesn't ground or create an oil spill," Pilot manager, Captain Trond Kildal says.

Captain Kildal oversees 11 pilots, who work across all of the major ports from Mourilyan, right around the Cape.

"It's an extremely rewarding job, here in the Far North," he says. "We get to work with very different ships, from bulk carriers, barges, cattle ships and the big cruise ships. It's covering the whole spectrum. I don't think there's another region like it in Australia that has the variety we have."

To be a marine pilot one has to have Master Class 1 ticket.

"The training is very exclusive and very long," Captain Kildal says. "A pilot has to have five licences to have unrestricted check. That takes five years alone."

And it's no wonder. These pilots are dealing with another factor in the Far North – the weather.

"We are the last ones who take the ships out to sea before a cyclone; and we're often the first to get back out there with food and supplies and to get the exports back on track," Captain Kildal says.

### *Ship to shore*

As a ship closes in on the Cairns wharves, Ports North linesmen are on hand to make the ship fast, using ropes as specified by the Harbour Master.

Then customs, immigration, environment and DAFF officials, and the agent, board the vessel.

The ship's captain must have all papers in order - the crew manifest (passports, etc), the cargo or passenger declaration, and agricultural clearance (making sure the ballast water is clear, garbage has been secured and the ships meat locker is sealed).

Once the paper work is done, the government agencies clear the ship to allow those on board to leave.

The strict clearance is reversed, step by step, when a ship wants to leave the harbour. If it doesn't get the clearance, then it won't be able to enter another port.

### **Ports North**

The ship is now a guest of port authority Ports North, the land owner and landlord of much of the Cairns foreshore.

When ships berth, Ports North Operations team ensures passengers, crew and cargo are secure, safe and have everything they need.

The government-owned corporation runs most of the Cairns waterfront and is responsible for any new developments that could improve the region's business and economic well-being.

It also manages the ports at Cape Flattery, Karumba, Mourilyan, Skardon River, Quintell Beach, Thursday Island, Burketown and Cooktown.

But the Port of Cairns is its centrepiece; it is the lifeblood for the region.

It caters to cargo, cruises, a fishing fleet (one of Australia's largest) and Reef passenger ferries and charter boats. It is also a base for navy patrol and survey vessels. Indeed, it is often second only to Sydney as the busiest cruise shipping harbour in the country.

Its jewel in the crown is the stunning Marlin Marina, with its 261 pontoon berths for game fishing, dive, recreation and tourist vessels up to 80m in length, as well as the 30 reef fleet berths and 10 berths for super yachts.

Needless to say, with so much activity on the water front, Ports North is big on security.

"We have a dedicated team of officers down on the wharf, in the marina and in our operations office ensuring things run smoothly," Marine Services Supervisor Damien Cranswick says.

"We maintain a security presence 24 hours a day throughout the port and we are constantly monitoring the foreshore with our state-of-the-art CCTV cameras."

The Ports North operations team also work closely with the Queensland Emergency Services and often run drills and exercises to ensure the port is ready for anything.

Mr Cranswick says the Port caters for all requirements: "Basically we have to make everyone happy, juggle the priorities and the diverse needs on the waterfront, while making sure it remains as open as possible for public use."

And, when a cruise liner arrives, Ports North puts out the welcome mat for the passengers and will present a plaque to any ship that is making its maiden voyage. On leaving, passengers get to feast on the region's tropical fruits while a band bids them farewell.

It's a nice touch - one which Ports North Chairman Brett Moller says is among the many reasons why Cairns is such a popular stop on the tourist route.

“Cairns is an excellent microcosm of how ports throughout the world can operate,” he says.

“We run a tight ship. It’s also why we are proud to celebrate World Maritime Day with our staff. It’s a day where the industry reflects on how far shipping safety, maritime security and caring for the marine environment has come.

“I would encourage everyone to spend a day at the Inlet. Take a look at the beautiful ships and think about the incredible dedication it takes to bring them safely to shore.”

And despite, or perhaps because of, the close monitoring and liaison between the various agencies around the harbour, Cairns is also one of the most open and relaxed ports on the east coast.

“On World Maritime Day, why not walk along the foreshore and enjoy the peaceful and eye-catching spots that line the inlet,” Mr Moller said. “Have a fish at the purpose-built fishing wharf, or sit at one of the many cafes, take in the views and just feel the breeze.

“It’s everyone’s port. It is the heartbeat for Cairns. It is something we can all celebrate.”

ENDS

## Fact Box: how does it all work?

- A vessel notifies a shipping agent of its pending arrival:
- The agent logs the request into the state-wide shipping database, Q-Ships.
- Vessel Traffic Services ensures the request in Q-Ships can be met, and with instruction from the Harbour Master, whether the boat needs a marine pilot and whether the channel is deep enough for entry. It also monitors a ship’s approach, the weather or any other variables through on-screen maps and surveillance cameras.
- A marine pilot meets the ship at the channel entry and navigates it toward shore.
- Linesmen secure the boat to its berth, as allocated by Ports North.
- Maritime Safety, Immigration, Customs and DAFF then board to check the captain’s paper work and biosecurity measures.
- Passengers and crew are allowed to go on shore.
- Ports North ensures the ships security, maintenance, waste and fuel requirements are met during its stay.

## About World Maritime Day

*World Maritime Day is celebrated in many countries worldwide, including Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States.*

*Throughout history, people have understood that international regulations followed by many countries worldwide could improve marine safety, so many treaties have been adopted since the 19th century. A UN international conference in Geneva in 1948 adopted a convention formally*

*establishing the International Maritime Organisation (IMO), a specialised UN agency that develops and maintains a comprehensive regulatory framework for shipping.*

*The IMO focuses on areas such as safety, environmental concerns, legal matters, technical co-operation, maritime security and the efficiency of shipping.*

*World Maritime Day was first held on March 17, 1978, to mark the date of the IMO Convention's entry into force in 1958. At that time, the organisation had 21 member states. It now has about 167 member states and three associate members. This membership includes virtually all the nations of the world with an interest in maritime affairs, including those involved in the shipping industry and coastal states with an interest in protecting their maritime environment.*